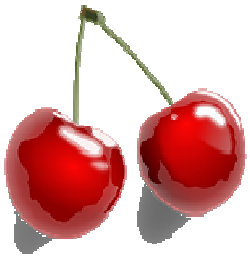

The Difference between Glycemic Index and Glycemic Load

These are numbers that reflect the impact that a particular food has on the amount of sugar in the blood.

The higher the number, the Glycemic Index, (GI) the quicker the rise of sugar in the blood. Table sugar, for example, causes a fast rise in blood sugar. Similarly white bread. Even though bread does not taste sweet, it is a simple carbohydrate with no fiber so it takes no time at all for the body to break it down into pure glucose. Potato is another carbohydrate that breaks down very fast.

Whenever there is a rise in blood sugar, the pancreas will secrete insulin and while limited insulin is necessary, too much insulin causes insulin resistance and increases risks of diabetes. Flooding of insulin also causes sudden drops in blood sugar which may result in 'reactive hypoglycemia' and a sensation of shakiness and fatigue.

The impact of high glycemic foods and the resultant rise in insulin, has far reaching effects on health, particularly with regard to obesity and diabetes. Foods with a GI greater than 45 are best avoided, especially if one is overweight or diabetic. In fact, for long term health even slim people should stick to foods with a low GI

However, some foods, although high GI, are also high in fiber or water, so in normal portion sizes, have very little impact on the sugar in the blood. An example of this is carrot. It takes 6.6 cups of carrots to impact on blood sugar in the same way as 1 cup of cooked spaghetti.

The glycemic load takes this into consideration and is thus a more practical measure of what impact the carbohydrate is having in the body.

Strawberries, for example, have a glycemic index of 40 but a glycemic load of 3.6.

Watermelon has a GI of 72 but a GL of 4.

Choose foods that have a GL of 10 or less.